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PICASSO AND THINGS: THE STILL LIVES OF PICASSO

February 26 - May 3, 1992

The first exhibition devoted to Picasso's still lifes, **Picasso and Things: The Still Lives of Picasso**, opens at The Cleveland Museum of Art on February 26, 1992. Part of the Museum's year-long celebration of its 75th anniversary, the exhibition assembles more than one hundred of Picasso's paintings, drawings, collages, sculptures, constructions and mixed media works. A small distinguished group of still life paintings and ? in the Cleveland Museum collection are the point of departure for the exhibition, which examines the place that still lifes played in the great body of work Picasso created over his long career.

Both the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue divide the still lifes into six periods: up to 1908, after he made the great Les Femmes d'Alger; from 1910-1913, the Cubist period; from 1914 to 1921, embracing Synthetic Cubism and Neoclassicism; from 1922 to 1936, generally a period of satisfaction in his life mirrors in his work; from 1937 to 1946, the somber World War II years; and the final period, from 1947 to 1973.

Jean Sutherland Boggs, invited by the Cleveland Museum to be guest curator of the exhibition, also wrote the catalogue's introduction and entries. Her collaborators, both from Musée Picasso, Paris (co-organizing the exhibition), are Marie-Laure Bernadac and Brigitte Leal. Associated with them in organizing this landmark exhibition are Evan H. Turner, Director of The Cleveland Museum of Art; Ann d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Gerard Regnier, Director of the Musée Picasso.

The exhibition will close in Cleveland on May 3, 1992 then will travel to the Philadelphia Museum of Art June 14 through August 23, 1992, and the Grand Palais, Paris September 22 through December 28, 1992. The catalogue (pp. ? price ?, illus?) is available from the CMA Museum Store

beginning (?). Each chapter begins with a chronology of his life, events in the lives of people who mattered to him, and the work he was doing.

United Technologies is making possible the international presentation of the exhibition and its catalogue. Additional support is provided through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, and a grant from the Ohio Arts Council. Continental Airlines is providing transportation.

A symposium is planned at The Cleveland Museum of Art during the first weekend of the exhibition, Saturday, February 29, and Sunday, March 1, 1992.

Public Programs in Cleveland... **(KATIE WILL GIVE PI THE LIST OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS ON FRIDAY, OCT 18)**

Description

The term "still life" may seem inapplicable to Picasso's works, which appear neither still nor silent, but, as Marie-Laure Bernadac writes in the catalogue, "garrulous and even dramatic." In his view, things participated in their own way in the universal laws, the circulation of energy and the biological processes of life and death. Picasso's animism endowed each inanimate object with a soul and gave a human status to the homely objects he saw and touched and the rooms in which they were used.

Jean Boggs sees Picasso as unselfconsciously absorbing and painting whatever was around him intuitively ridding himself of emotions. Autobiographical in nature, his numerous still lifes appear in series and at very specific times. Throughout his life, new romance, invariably showed up in some form in the still lifes; often a compote and a bottle, represent male and female, flirtatious toward each other, intimate and domestic. Having inherited the Spanish tradition of humble and mystical kitchen scenes, Picasso was particularly attentive to the domestic and utilitarian aspect of objects, their familiar beauty and humble yet necessary existence. Furthermore, he worked within a modern tradition that, after Cézanne, considered the still life the best expression of formalism.

Picasso's still lifes were intrinsically related to the development of Cubism, whose pictorial aims led him to examine closely the fixed object, its form, and its relation to space. As he moved away from Cubism, at the end of the teens, he experimented with the passage from Cubist to classic space through the theme of the pedestal table (gueridon) in front of a window, combining interior and exterior space. In the 1920's he created a series of luxuriant and colorful still lifes, and in the early 1930's biomorphic still lifes with attributes of sexual fertility. During World War II and the occupation, he produced somber still lifes, and after the war decorative pictures. Although at the end of his life the human figure reigned supreme, he also painted bouquets of wild, organic, and aggressive flowers, the subjects of his first still lifes. He spoke of still lifes as his "parables" and "metaphors," in which his emotions worked themselves out.

Chapter 1: to 1908

Indifferent to the material world except as transformed by an artist's vision and indifferent to his facility to achieve illusions, Picasso early established for himself three important facts about still life: his objects would be simple, they could have more than one meaning, and an empty vessel could be poignant. Moreover, things---whether once animate, like pears, or manmade, like vessels of clay--were related to the human body.

Still Life (La Desserte) [Museo Picasso, Barcelona, 1901], with its abundance and variety of simple objects, appears to have been Picasso's first ambitious still life. It reflects his fascination with modern French painting, especially Cézanne and Gauguin, but its expressive exaggerations of form and especially color--richly applied yellow, oranges, reds, greens, luminous whites--signal his personal style.

A familiar motif throughout Picasso's imagery is the skull--at first the human skull, much later animal skulls as well. A large pen and ink drawing, Skull, Ink Well and Hammer [Musée Picasso, ©R.M.N.-SPADEM, Paris, 1907], a genuine memento of death, is closely related to the great Still Life with Death's Head [The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, 1907], undoubtedly the most

sensational of Picasso's early still life paintings. Boggs calls it a "restless and anxious composition," symbolizing the painter's world and the solace offered by tobacco, books, the sensuality in nature, and the seductive nude. Many important works in the exhibition take a skull as their focal point: Musical Instrument & Death's Head [Musée Moderne Villeneuve d'Ascq, ©R.M.N.-SPADEM, 1913]; Bull's Skull, Fruit, Pitcher [The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1939]; Still Life with Steer's Skull [Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 1942]; Goat's Skull and Bottle [The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1951-53].

Another of the great early paintings is Table with Loaves and Bowl of Fruit [Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum, 1908-1909 or early 1909]. Its foreground is a drop-leaf table, shaped like a cope, painted with such gestural freedom and luminosity that on first look it dominates the five-foot high canvas. The objects on the table--among them a cool white compote and a napkin--arranged so formally that they have the greatest ceremonial dignity, are presented as if they were part of the Eucharist, recorded with the simplicity and clarity of Zurbaran's still lifes.

Fan, Salt Box, Melon [The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1909] reveals how much Picasso was pursuing Cézanne and going beyond him into Cubism. To the simple salt box he gave great complexity. The variety in color and brush work interpret light and shadow and make us experience the salt box in space while understanding that it is part of a two-dimensional canvas. The most eccentric and beautiful part of the painting is the melon; it literally glows, as if there were a light within it.

Chapter 2: 1910-1913

By 1910 the individuality of the object in Picasso's still lifes is almost lost in the common color and texture of paint, its contours sometimes merging into other forms. The spatial organization shifts, becoming more mysterious than Cézanne's, up and down and compressed closer to the picture plane. Probably attracted to musical instruments under Braque's influence, Picasso added to his subjects musical instruments and scores and written words.

Life with Chair-Caning [Musée Picasso, ©R.M.N.-SPADEM, Paris, 1912], a small canvas about one foot wide, is one of the icons of Cubism. It may, says Boggs, "quite genuinely be the most seminal work in the history of the movement." The colors are the restrained grays, whites, browns, and blacks of "analytic" Cubism, the first stage of the movement. The oval that Braque and Picasso favored, demonstrating their common interest in a canvas as an independent object, is here turned unconventionally on its side. Fact and fiction are shuffled: a piece of oil cloth that had been printed to imitate the cane of a chair has been pasted on the canvas. The oval is framed with a continuous hemp rope, its coarseness a shock against the smooth sophistication and subtlety of the painting. The Cubist handling of color, paint and light has become extraordinarily sensitive; this work of modest proportion is both so complex and so beautifully resolved that it is one of the unquestionable masterpieces of the 20th century.

Chapter 3: 1914-1921

There is not a consistent stylistic development in these years. Picasso used a naturalistic style and eventually a neoclassical style, at the same time that he continued to produce Cubist works. "Synthetic" Cubism supplants the analytic Cubism of the works before 1914. Motifs and moods that appear include an apparent longing for domesticity and a particularly inventive spirit of fun. Food, always an important theme for Picasso, is most engagingly the subject of a Chicken, Wine Glass, Knife, and Bottle, [Private Collection, 1913]. On a large piece of white paper he pasted a piece of brown paper, the brown of a crisply roasted bird cut like a plump chicken. With charcoal he gave the illusion of relief by modeling the bird and casting its shadow on the white table. New iconographic elements intensify the sense of chance--dice, cards, etc. Bottle of Anise del Mono, Wine Glass, and Playing Card [Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, 1915], with its diamond-faceted liquor bottle is related, as William Rubin has pointed out, to the commedia dell'arte figure with which Picasso identified himself (most notably in the large Harlequin (1915) in The Museum of Modern Art, not in the exhibition. Such works were reflect his sorrow at the death of his mistress,

Eva in 1915. As the many charming still lifes in gouache in, 1920, after he married and just before he became a father for the first time, mirror his happiness.

Picasso turned to classical sources and experiments with classical forms after he had seen Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other Italian sites in 1917. Still Life with a Jug and Apples [Musée Picasso, ©R.M.N.-SPADEM, Paris, 1919], relatively small and supremely classical and balanced, must have been important to him, as he kept it in his collection. Boggs observes that an eccentric work without parallel, a canvas of Studies [Musée Picasso, ©R.M.N.-SPADEM, Paris, 1920-22], which may be a "summa of his own position at this moment in his career," reminding himself that he was part of an ancient tradition.

Chapter 4: 1922-1936

Picasso's most memorable still lifes of the 1920's and early 30's are generous and sometimes exuberant, presumably an expression of his prosperity, his domestic and sexual satisfaction, and his general happiness. The most radiant is probably the large and expansive Mandolin and Guitar [The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1924]; the artist seemed to relish and create space without losing the appeal of the painting's surface. Another is Still Life with Biscuits [The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1924]. By the end of the 20's he appears to have found still lifes unequal to the intensity of emotions he could express more violently with the human body, but in 1932-32 he turned to still life again as a happy expression of a new domestic serenity and sexuality with a very young woman, Marie-Therese Walter.

From 1924 on, Picasso was fascinated by the introduction of a classical bust into his still lifes. The bust in Studio with Plaster Head [The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1925] has neither the decorative qualities of earlier ones nor the ferocious Roman realism he sometimes used; its profile is exuberant, stopping just short of caricature.

Chapter 5: 1937-1946

The years between 1937 and 1945 are the most somber of Picasso's life, their monotony unrelieved during the war by any activities with the Resistance, and with no woman sharing the place where he lived (except for a few months). His works echo events over which he had no control. In 1938 he painted an extraordinary group of hallucinative still lifes with the head of the minotaur or bull. One of the most notable here is Palette, Candlestick and Head of Minotaur [National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 1938], a vivid and emotion-packed record of the anxieties of the late 1930's. With a single candle to light the world of his still life, Picasso arranged his objects on a table with a palette, three bent brushes, traced defiantly over the book in the center between candle and the bust. Another in the powerful series is Still Life with Red Bull's Head (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1938).

Bull's Skull, Fruit, Pitcher [The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 1939] was painted just a few days after his mother's death and the fall of Barcelona as the Republicans were losing the Civil War in Spain. Though painted in turbulent days, it includes signs of hope: two pieces of fruit are reminders of the abundance and continuance of nature and a small tree, clearly symbolic from its size, puts forth blossoms. Another animal skull Still Life with Steer's Skull [Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 1942] is a work of mourning painted after the death of his friend, the Spanish sculptor Julio Gonzales.

Yet another skull appears in the positive and self-assured Sheep's Skull and Coffeepot and Candle [Centre Georges Pompidou, ©R.M.N.-SPADEM, Paris, 1944], evidencing genuine relaxed joy in the painting and more optimism than any of his still lifes until the war is over. (He included it for a gift of ten works to the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris). About this painting he told Françoise Gilot, then his companion; "I want to tell something by means of the most common object--for me it is a vessel in the metaphoric sense, just like Christ's use of parables." Women were, as always, very much a part of his life. His wife, Olga, was on the periphery; he was protective of Marie-Thérèse and their daughter but did not include them in his Paris life; another woman,

Dora Maar, was very much a part of his life with friends. Each companion provided him with a different approach to still life. With Dora, an intellectual and complex woman, we see bristling candles, flames, glasses of green leaves; with Marie-Therese, domestic and generous still lifes are full of the sensual pleasures of color, light, and fulfillment in dialogues between jugs and fruit.

Chapter 6: 1947-1973

His wife, Olga, died in 1955 and in 1961 he married a young woman, Jacqueline Roque; Picasso was about to turn 80. One charming picture from this period, The Eels [Centro Reina Sophia, Barcelona, 1940], bears on the back his inscription "My homage to Jacqueline for the fish stew she made for lunch, 3 December 1960, and to whom I offer this picture with no other desire than to please her" and he signed it "Picasso."

From this period also comes Goat's Skull and Bottle [The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1953]. Picasso was a master at creating evocative sculptures out of commonplace materials. Here he combined and cast in bronze an odd collection of found objects; the goat's horns were created from bicycle handlebars, its teeth and hair from small nails, its eyes from bolts, and the light rays emanating from the bottle from long nails. He splayed the bottle open in Cubist fashion to reveal its interior construction and to imply that solid volumes have been transformed into transparent planes.

Picasso was 87 years old when he painted the last work in the exhibition, Still Life with Umbrella [Private Collection, 1968]. He returned to the theme of the artist's studio, perhaps comparing his achievements with those other artists. A marble bust is set on a table before a window, reminiscent of Matisse's use of the open window as a metaphor for a painting. The bust (very likely an alter-ego for the artist) gazes outward, contemplating the world and the passage of time. The umbrella humorously suggests a hand holding a brush; Picasso paints with prodigious energy in a freewheeling Cubist-Expressionist style, combining brilliant Mediterranean colors and a truly masterful, sensual handling of paint.